



TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

James White

*House District 19
Jasper, Newton, Hardin, Polk, Tyler*

CORRECTIONS
CHAIR

REDISTRICTING

JUDICIARY &
CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, January 22, 2021

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87th Texas Legislature Convenes - Weekly Legislative Update 1/15/21 -

Proverbs 8:15-16 "By Me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly."

(Austin, TX) - Beginning this journey in public service in 2010, I started from the simple origin that every Texan is made in the image of God, and thus, being elected to serve God's people comes with a high degree of expectations and responsibility. My staff and I love everyone in Hardin, Jasper, Newton, Polk, and Tyler counties. I am very grateful to the voters for allowing me to serve again in one of the most storied deliberative bodies in modern history: the Texas House of Representatives.

As directed by the Texas Government Code 301.001, the Texas Legislature begins its regular session on the second Tuesday in January of each odd-numbered year. Therefore, on Tuesday, January 12th, I was humbled to once again take the oath to uphold the constitutions of Texas and the United States and serve the citizens in Hardin, Jasper, Newton, Polk, and Tyler counties. As I took the oath, I was joined on the House floor at the Capitol by one of my former student-athletes, B.J. Hutto, and my lovely wife, Gem White.

My floor desk assignment is Desk 77. In each desk in the Texas House, is a Christian Holy Bible. The front and back covers are blue with the Texas State Seal embossed on the front. In the front of the Bible, the member can find out which Texas legislators sat at that particular desk in past sessions, the counties they represented, and a scripture that inspired them through the session. Then at the next available blank entry, the current member has an opportunity to write his/her name, the House District he or she serves, the session number, and a scripture that will inspire him or her throughout the session. After prayerful consideration, I chose **Proverbs 8:15-16 "By Me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly."** For earthly government officials, this is reminder that although our fellow citizens have elected us to serve in three different branches of government, the power truly lies with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the People who are the Sovereigns of civil government. However, this scripture does come with obligation or responsibility to govern justly.



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Your Texas Constitution limits the regular session of the Legislature for 140 days. Article III, Section 9 of the Texas Constitution mandates that the members of the Texas House elect a speaker. The state constitution states that **every** member of the House is a candidate. Unless changed by a constitutional amendment, House members cannot eliminate or restrict a nomination of a member for House speaker. On the first day of the session, the members of Texas House select the Speaker or its presiding officer. This session I proudly joined all of my colleagues to unanimously select our neighbor Rep. Dade Phelan of Beaumont.

Additionally, the sights at your Capitol are very different due to the protocols in place to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Both the House and Senate have put rules in place that must be followed by Texas citizens wishing to come either tour the building or petition their government. The Senate requires all visitors to test and receive a negative COVID test before entering the building.

However, the Texas House has left the decision to each individual member. Our office does not discourage visits from any constituent who wishes to visit their Texas Capitol during the legislative session. This legislative office belongs to you. I will not require you to make an appointment and the wearing of a mask is your discretion. I understand that the Governor's mask order has exemptions for youth and medical reasons. I trust the virtue of our constituents. I will have masks and hand sanitizer available. Your legislative office is on the 4th floor and we have a small space outside of the office where we can meet with you and practice social distancing.

My staff has been provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). To ensure the health and safety of staff and visitors and promote the continuity of government, my staff will wear masks in the Capitol. My staff will test regularly for the COVID-19 antigens. Continuity of government, that is, being able to maintain legislative operations is paramount. Staff will cross-train on legislative office responsibilities and have contingencies to work off site remotely in the event of an infection or exposure. As with our constituents and visitors, I respect health information privacy and health care freedom. I have asked my staff to consult with their doctors regarding the vaccine and distribution eligibility should they want to take one.

Austin public health officials have offered state legislators COVID-19 vaccination regardless of their health conditions and outside the bounds of the state priority guidelines. As I have stated



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several days ago, I will not jump the line in front of our veterans, senior citizens, Texans with high risk health conditions, and essential professionals and workers such as truck drivers, teachers, and grocery store workers, to name a few. I am not 65 years of age or older and I do not have high risk health conditions. I will continue practicing sound precautions, exercising, eating healthy, and waiting my turn in line.

Instead, my focus is on increasing the vaccination opportunities for the seniors, veterans, and other Texans that are desperately calling my office seeking information about how to get vaccinated. Concerned about their congregations, pastors are calling as well for information. On Wednesday, January 13th, I scheduled a vaccine administration coordination meeting with our county judges, public health officials, emergency response coordinators, and other stakeholders. This meeting also included Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Associate Commissioner for Laboratory and Infectious Disease Imelda Garcia. We discussed the needs in East Texas. Commissioner Garcia assured our county judges that if they plan and resource mass vaccination points and clearly show that they will use all requested vaccine, DSHS will coordinate with the CDC to insure that we get the vaccine supply requested.

The House and Senate both adjourned on January 14th and will convene once again on the 26th. This is a customary adjournment on inauguration years to allow members who wish to attend the presidential inauguration at our nation's capital. However, I am meeting with constituents and drafting legislation in Austin.

The Capitol of Texas belongs to you and visiting the Capitol during the biennial legislative session is a great experience. To assist in arranging your visit please call Saul Mendoza, my Chief of Staff, at (512) 463-0490. Or, you can email him at saul.mendoza@house.texas.gov.

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